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OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

Research and Analysis Branch

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REFERENCE DIVISION
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R & A NO. 1529

"GERMAN MORALE IN ASSOCIATION WITH A POSSIBLE INVASION OF WESTERN EUROPE"

Description

A careful study, taking into consideration certain alternative military assumptions, of the possible future trend of German morale in the event of an invasion of Western Europe.

17 November 1943

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17 November 1943

[redacted] LONDON X

R&A X

Referring to your cable [redacted] this is the considered opinion of the R&A staff:

The answers to questions (a) and (b) require alternative assumptions as to military developments up to April 1, 1944:

Assumption I: Attrition of the German army and home front continues at the prevailing rate.

Assumption II: Germany suffers a major setback from the morale point of view (such as Stalingrad) in Russia and/or the Anglo-American forces in Italy acquire air bases from which Austria, Czechoslovakia and Silesia are subjected to frequent raids.

If by April 1, 1944, Assumption I holds true, questions (a) and (b) must be answered in the negative. If Assumption II holds true, question (a) must still be answered in the negative; question (b) can very probably be answered in the affirmative if an invasion in the West meets with initial success.

German morale is certainly low and is likely to deteriorate still further with the military situation. There is an almost universal desire for peace and an increasing willingness to accept unconditional surrender. Under a totalitarian dictatorship, however, the "morale" of the subjected population becomes a relevant disintegrating force only if and as the potential opposition can translate itself into open action. The political strait-jacket provided by the Nazi Party effectively maintains social discipline and economic production. The two weakest spots in the Nazi system are: (1) control of German and foreign workers, who represent the strongest internal opposition; and (2) control over the satellite and conquered states. These danger spots, however, will cause actual disintegration only if the control apparatus ceases to function.

In a situation as outlined under Assumption I, nothing would warrant such an expectation. Air raids---even if on a larger scale than the average August to November raids--- will not destroy or seriously impair Nazi controls, which have proved to possess considerable flexibility. The population in the occupied and satellite countries will certainly grow more rebellious, but the Nazi control apparatus is likely to keep them in line. An invasion from the West may touch off local strikes and revolts, but there is no reason to assume that, under these circumstances, the Nazi regime will not be strong enough to cope with them. We can therefore assume that the Nazi armies will continue to fight and will be able to face effectively an attack from the West.

Assumption II represents an entirely different situation. Steady Russian

advances on the Eastern front would open the road for a direct attack on the essential industrial centers in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Utilization of Central Italian air bases would subject to air attacks the hitherto protected regions of the Reich. Up to November 1, 1943, about 6.5 million people have been bombed out and evacuated; by April 1944, this figure will have risen considerably. This, and the feeling that no region in the Greater Reich is any longer secure from air raids will create a feeling of utter hopelessness not only on the civilian but also on the fighting front which---under totalitarian conditions---is entirely dependent upon the home front.

We cannot assume that the Nazi system will be overthrown by a mass revolt. The political opposition is still localized and atomized and it is unlikely that it can be organized on a national or even regional basis. But, it may happen that, after successive heavy raids on a great industrial center, the workers refuse to return to the plants, and that this spontaneous strike spreads over a larger territory. The Nazis may be capable of coping with these upheavals with the help of the SS, and perhaps parts of the Wehrmacht. In this case, dissenting groups within the Nazi Party and in the Army Command may be kept in line. The deteriorating military situation, however, is bound to bring about a repetition of such incidents on an increasingly larger scale. This would lead to a definite disruption of the Nazi control apparatus, perhaps first only to the regional level. Unrest will spread into the occupied countries, Germany's hold over her satellites will break down, and the German soldiers, fearing that in case of defeat they will fall victims

to the revenge of the subjected population, might become demoralized. Even in such a situation, the Nazi state may still possess considerable recuperative powers, and may be able to quench these revolts. However, if an invasion from the West occurs at such a critical juncture, it is probable that the morale of the German army will be so much weakened that it will not be able to put up effective resistance.

The other possibility is that there will be no overt signs of a deterioration of German morale before an invasion in the West. The invasion itself might provide the spark through which local strikes and revolts and the rebellion of occupied Europe are touched off.

These conditions would give elements in the ruling groups an opportunity to turn against a leadership which is no longer able to handle the situation. Certain non-Nazi army commanders might realize that the security of the army was endangered, and that the only chance for survival lay in an orderly withdrawal within the borders of the Reich and in an immediate offer of surrender. Since the present Nazi leadership has committed itself against such a surrender, a military coup d'etat might be joined by the dissenting factions within the Nazi party, which may then feel it worth the risk to dissociate themselves from the present leadership. The conservative faction in the Nazi Party, represented by the Goering clique, would be likely to join a military coup d'etat because their interests could thereby be preserved. The "National Bolshevist" wing might join for ulterior reasons, to save the Party and to go underground. The leadership

of industry, finance, agriculture, the civil service and of the churches would support the army in order to prevent the outbreak of a revolution and to maintain the traditional social system. The success of such a putsch would depend entirely upon the initiative of strong parts of the army leadership.

Although the putschists would make every conceivable effort to keep the fronts intact until the home front is "pacified" and until a new government had sued for peace, military resistance would be impaired to such an extent that it could not for any length of time fight off an invasion from the West and a Russian offensive from the East. The military coup d'etat would split the army and would give rise to articulate political opposition and possible revolution.

A positive policy of political warfare which gives definite assurances to the genuine anti-Nazi opposition might accelerate the process of disintegration.

W.L.L.